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ABSTRACT

An effective academic advising system can assist in the retention of two-year college students; however, the institution and its faculty must be committed to providing such a system. Establishing a successful advising system would require the following: (1) a clear distinction must be made between academic advising and course scheduling; (2) academic advisers should meet with advisees at least once during the quarter other than registration time; (3) academic advisers should be faculty members who are genuinely interested in advisement; (4) the institution should support the faculty member in this role by ensuring reasonable workloads, conducting in-service training, providing handbooks and other institutional documents, and recognizing the role and contribution of the advisers; (5) academic advisement should be provided in a number of ways since no universal delivery system operates best for all students; (6) academic advisement should serve to develop students' educational and career goals, and thereby reduce attrition; and (7) the system of academic advisement should be evaluated systematically by all participants on a regular basis and identified problems corrected. (EJV)

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ACADEMIC ADVISING FOR RETENTION PURPOSES

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ABSTRACT

Academic Advising for Retention Purposes

The purpose of Academic Advising for Retention Purposes is to present an overall view that an academic advisement system may definitely assist in the retention of students; however, the institution must be committed to a system of advisement and faculty must be genuinely interested.

Faculty members who are interested in academic advisement must be used. Advisers should be selected. They must have reasonable workloads. In-service training sessions supplemented by institutional documents assist the faculty members in better academic advisement. Advisers should be recognized for their academic advisement work.

The system of academic advisement must be evaluated by all participants on a regular basis. Without input and subsequent correction of problems, the system of academic advisement becomes less effective.

INTRODUCTION

Academic advising or some form of it is viewed as a part of most educational institution's responsibilities. The amount of academic advising and the delivery system varies not only between institutions, but also within institutions.

Various questions arise such as: How much academic advising really goes on within the institution? Is it actually course scheduling or academic advising? Who should advise? What are the delivery systems? Should academic advising be required? Why advise? Is academic advisement a service educational institutions can afford to eliminate?

The writer makes several premises which are as follows: 1) that academic advisement should be required, 2) that academic advisement should be classified as academic advisement and course scheduling should be classified as course scheduling, 3) that academic advisers should meet with advisees at least once during the quarter other than at registration time, 4) that academic advisers should be individuals who are genuinely interested in serving as advisers, 5) that academic advisement should be delivered by a number of ways since no universal delivery system operates best for all students, and 6) that properly delivered academic advising programs serve to develop students' educational and career goals thus reducing attrition.

Prior to establishing any effective academic advisement program at any institution, the administration must decide if it can forego an academic advisory system. If the administration posits that an academic advisory system is important, then administrative commitment is next (Crockett, 1978). Following administrative commitment, "What the institution wants to achieve with its academic advising program and how it plans to implement the program,"

must be the next step (Crockett, 1978). Subsequent to administrative commitment supported by a plan to achieve academic advising, monies to operate an advisement system follows. Purposes and procedures must be presented and understood by all concerned (administrators, faculty, and students) in order for the academic advising program to ultimately succeed (Crockett, 1978).

If the academic advisement responsibility is assigned to faculty members as a part of their overall responsibilities along with full-time teaching loads, committee work, recruiting visits, speaking engagements, faculty and departmental meetings, etc., then the academic advisement duty seems to be viewed as another trivial administrative responsibility which does not contribute to faculty professional growth, recognition, or reward (Bostaph & Moore, 1980; Teague & Grites, 1980). On the other hand, if genuinely interested faculty members either volunteered to serve as academic advisers or were actively recruited to serve as academic advisers with ultimate benefits, they would view the academic advisement function as a necessary part of the educational institution's service for the student, for themselves, and for the institution.

ACADEMIC ADVISING AS RETENTION

Academic advising programs may serve as one means of retention of students. Properly administered academic advisement programs can provide: exploration of life goals, of vocational goals, of program and course choice and of scheduling (O'Banion, 1972). Astin's research (1975) related that students remained in college if they were committed to a career goal,if they achieved grades commensurate with their abilities, and if they developed a positive attitude about the institution. Durkheim, as related by Tinto (1975), attributed persistence in college to students integration into a social system of college and their

congruency with the prevailing value patterns of college collectively. Pascarella and Terenzini found that students were influenced by both formal as well as informal non-teaching contacts with faculty in deciding whether to persist or withdraw from an institution (1980, p. 72; 1979, p. 207). The quality and impact of student-faculty relationships was more importatnt to students' decisions to persist or withdraw from school than the quality and impact of students' peer relationships (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, p. 72). Beal and Noel's (1980) research revealed in rank order the negative factors in student retention as:

1. inadequate academic advising,
2. inadequate curricular offerings,
3. conflict between class schedule and job,
4. inadequate financial aid,
5. inadequate extracurricular offerings, and
6. inadequate counseling support system.

Postive factors in student retention rank order were listed as:

1. caring attitudes of faculty and staff,
2. high quality of teaching,
3. adequate financial aid,
4. student involvement in campus life, and
5. high quality of advising. (p. 43)

EFFECTIVE ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT PROGRAMS

An academic advising program does not just come about. It develops as a result of purposes, procedures, objectives, and goals being established. Its effectiveness depends directly on the coordination between the academic advisory staff and the academic departments (Abel, 1980). In addition, its effectiveness is related to the support services including the curriculum committee, the learning resource center, the orientation committee, and the student services department (Abel, 1980).

ADVISERS

Academic advisers must be screened prior to being selected. They must be individuals willing to work with students in a helping relationship. They must be individuals willing to meet students individually or in small groups in order to discuss "topics relating to student's life goals, educational/career goals, educational program, progress and problems" (Crockett, 1978, p.33). Academic advising is more than course scheduling! It involves meeting with students prior to a registration and/or course/major change, and referring students who need further assistance to appropriate people (Crockett, 1978). Academic advising is neither course scheduling nor signing a student-prepared registration form!

ALTERNATIVES TO FACULTY ADVISING

Since no one delivery system is successful with all institutions and all types of students, combinations of people and delivery methods need to be considered. Crockett (1982) lists the following methods of academic advising:

1. Part and full-time faculty advisers may be augmented by part and full time professional counselors.
2. Paraprofessionals including departmental secretaries and record's office personnel may serve as adjunct advisers.
3. Group advising is another advising method.
4. Self-advisement is encouragement for responsible decision making.
5. Peer advising has proved to be an effective means of advisement.
6. Computer-assisted advisement assists academic advisers with immediate feedback.
7. An advisement center is staffed many times by full-time professional advisers.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Institutions must provide an in-service training program for academic advisers. A good advisement system cannot be conducted with only the school catalog, the student transcript of grades and a hand tracking system of courses (Spencer, Peterson, Nielson & Kramer, 1982). An in-service training session of 30 hours would provide basic counseling skills/techniques; videotapes; stimulation/ role playing; and advisement manual.

The advisement manual should include institutional policies and procedures, adviser checklist, curriculum

checklist, academic requirements, prerequisites, procedures for course substitution, procedures for credit-by-examination, standards of progress, attendance requirements, financial aid information, veterans assistance information, career information, campus resources, community referral services, transfer possibilities, and adviser responsibilities to name a few.

If at all possible, the adviser should have computer assistance as a backup for the students' academic program. Computer assistance provides current student data which may not be available otherwise.

FACULTY ADVISERS LOAD

If faculty advisers are expected to perform effectively, they must have a reasonable student-advisee load, a reasonable teaching load, and a reasonable committee load (Crockett, 1978; Crockett, 1982). A quick way to undermine the overall effectiveness of an advisory system is to overwhelm faculty by assigning them from the outset or increasing their overall numbers of advisees with time. A large advisee load coupled with increased lack of time and unavailable information means an ineffecitve system approaching doom.

Successful academic advisers as viewed by students are those who: 1) are accessible, 2) have and disseminate specific and accurate academic information, 3) provide advise and counsel, and 4) have a personal and caring relationship with the advises (cited in Crockett, 1982; Spencer, Peterson, Neilson & Kramer, 1982). Institutions

need to consider reducing teaching loads of faculty members serving as academic advisers and increasing the teaching loads of faculty members not serving as academic advisers.

RECOGNITION OF GOOD ACADEMIC ADVISING

Crockett (1978) states that "administrators may reinforce good advising by a variety of means including extra compensation, reduction in workload, paid in-service training, consideration of advising effectiveness in promotion/tenure decisions, and award or other forms of public recognition" (p. 32). Certainly advisers experience personal rewards in assisting students, but the "lack of some type of tangible reward system can impede effective academic advising" (Crockett, 1978, p. 32).

EVALUATION

An academic advisory system without a system of evaluation is like a ship without a rudder. Advisee perceptions of faculty advisers and the services they provide cannot be overlooked. A student questionnaire of the adviser and the services rendered needs to be developed, disseminated to advisees, and requested to be returned to a central office for tabulation. In addition to student advisee evaluations, the director of the advisement program and the faculty advisers will need to evaluate the advisory system as a whole.

Evaluation of the advisory system must be systematic and periodic (Crockett, 1978, p. 34) rather than sporadic. Questionnaires should be supplemented with any other data which clearly relates the effectiveness of the advisement system. Changes and adjustments in the advisement system and the personnel who participate in it should result from a good evaluation process.

SUMMARY

An educational institution must first decide if it will provide an academic advisory system. Once the administration makes a commitment to offer an advisement system, it must be supported by monies, a plan, and procedures. An in-service training program needs to be provided for selected academic advisers. Advisers' student loads have to be manageable. Advisers must be available, knowledgeable, and caring individuals. Evaluating the academic advisory system and the individuals administering the program provides feedback for improving the system of advising and assisting advisers to improve in the delivery of services.

The community college has been accused of being a revolving door. Retention studies confirm that. Possibly one means of increasing retention is providing an academic advisory system or a variety of academic advisory delivery systems.

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